SPORT

Inter and AC Milan complete purchase of San Siro

MILAN: Inter Milan and AC Milan moved one step closer to a new stadium of their own on Wednesday after completing the purchase of the iconic San Siro, which is set for demolition.

The two Serie A clubs announced "the signing of the deed of sale with the Municipality of Milan", little more than a month after city approval for the acquisition of the land on which the stadium sits.

Nicknamed football's La Scala, San Siro is one of the world's most recognisable stadiums and the longtime home of Inter and AC Milan, who between them have been crowned European champions 10 times.

Inter and AC Milan obtained approval to purchase the land for 197 million euros ($231 million) after over 11 hours of debate and a knife-edge vote at Milan city hall in the early hours of September 30.

The sale needed to be completed by next Monday, otherwise a public building protection order for the San Siro's second tier would have come into effect.

Now the two clubs can now push ahead with a project worth around 1.2 billion euros which will radically change an area of just over 28 hectares (70 acres) in a densely-populated neighbourhood on the western outskirts of Milan.

A modern 71,500-capacity arena will be built on land — currently occupied by matchday car parking and a public park — to the immediate west of the current stadium which will continue to be used until the new one is completed.

Once the new ground is constructed, the San Siro will be almost entirely demolished to make way for new parkland, office space and entertainment facilities with everything to be designed by architectural firms Foster and Partners and MANICA.

The clubs are hoping to have the new stadium ready in time for Euro 2032, which is set to be jointly hosted by Italy and Turkey.

Italy's football federation needs to communicate to European governing body UEFA its five official picks for stadiums for that tournament by October next year, when it can present new venues or ones which need to be redeveloped as long as works begin by March 2027.

The current San Siro will host the opening ceremony of the upcoming Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics on Feb 6.—AFP

LIVERPOOL: Alexis Mac Allister (third R) of Liverpool heads to score against Real Madrid during their Champions League match at Anfield.—Reuters

Liverpool down Real in CL, Bayern edge PSG

PARIS: Alexis Mac Allister scored the only goal as Liverpool beat Real Madrid in the Champions League on Tuesday, while Luis Diaz grabbed a brace as Bayern Munich sunk title-holders Paris St-Germain 2-1 in the French capital.

Premier League leaders Arsenal won 3-0 at Slavia Prague as rising star Max Dowman came off the bench to become the youngest player in the competition's history, at just 15 years and 308 days old.

Leaders Bayern and second-placed Arsenal remain the only teams with a perfect record in the competition — alongside Inter Milan.

At Anfield, Real goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois produced a stellar performance to frustrate six-time champions Liverpool.

In a performance reminiscent of his match-defining display in the 2022 final against the same opposition — which the Spaniards won 1-0 — Courtois produced eight saves to keep back the hosts.

"He is a fantastic keeper — we all know," Mac Allister told Amazon Prime. "But today I think we were better and deserved to win."

Liverpool manager Arne Slot credited both the quality of the opposition and the passion of the Anfield crowd for inspiring his sides breathless win."Impressive because we played against an incredible side, a team that's on an unbelievable run of form, only lost once, won all their other games," Slot said. "If you then can win against them and perform how we have, that's very positive."

Diaz's dismissal changed the game for the hosts who fought back in the second period but Joao Neves' 74th-minute header was not enough to stop the Ligue 1 champions falling to a first defeat in this year's league phase.

The Dutchman also praised his sides defensive discipline, especially in keeping Kylian Mbappe and Vinicius Junior quiet.

"I said before the game that they have scored 26 goals in La Liga, and Mbappe and Vinicius together have 24 goal contributions," Slot said. "So, if you want to win this game you have to make sure that these two are not on the scoresheet."

Slot singled out 22-year-old right back Conor Bradley for his standout performance.

"Conor was outstanding. To be up against Vinicius so many times one versus one is not for everyone. He did outstanding today," Slot said.

The Argentinian eventually broke Courtois' resistance shortly after the hour with a header from a Dominik Szoboszlai free-kick in an encounter which saw former Liverpool hero Trent Alexander-Arnold return to his hometown amid a hail of boos when he emerged from the Real bench late on.

For previously unbeaten Real, it was first defeat in any competition since September's 5-2 reversal at Atletico Madrid.

"It's a tough blow to take because we came from a run of good games, but the important thing is to move forwards," Real's Fede Valverde told Movistar.

Meanwhile, PSG welcomed Bayern to the Parc des Princes for a fixture which midfielder Vitinha had said would bring together "the two best teams in Europe".

And it was the Bundesliga champions who emerged victorious as they made it 16 wins from 16 outings in all competitions this season.

"I know the Champions League winner is not decided now, otherwise PSG would not have won it last season," Bayern coach Vincent Kompany said. "But this was a very important three points."

Summer signing Diaz claimed the headlines as he netted a brace before being sent off for a dangerous tackle on Achraf Hakimi, all in the opening 45 minutes.

Hakimi had to be helped from the field in tears, following recent Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembele who came off after just 25 minutes.

D az wished PSG right back Hakimi "a quick return".

"It was a night full of emotions. Football always reminds us that, in 90 minutes, anything can happen the best and the worst. I was sad not to finish the match with my teammates, but proud of their incredible effort," D az posted on Instagram. "Wishing Hakimi a quick return to the pitch."

The mounting injury concerns have now become a serious issue for the European champions, extending a pattern that has hindered them since the start of the campaign.

"I can't remember a single match with the whole squad fit. It's a different kind of season, and we have to manage that. I'm calm and confident we'll recover our players and our level," PSG coach Luis Enrique said.

About Dembele's injury, Enrique said: "The injury has nothing to do with the previous one," Luis Enrique told reporters. "He played the time you saw it's not a relapse".

Bayern, on the other hand, sit top with a perfect 12 points.

ANOTHER CLEAN SHEET FOR ARSENAL

In Prague, Arsenal equalled a 122-year-old club record of eight successive games in all competitions without conceding a goal as they swept past Slavia Prague 3-0 to maintain their perfect record in Champions League with four wins out of four.

Mikel Merino, replacing injured striker Viktor Gyokeres, netted twice in the second period to seal victory against Prague, after Bukayo Saka opened the scoring from 12 yards in the 32nd minute.

"We are a very strong team, we are performing in an amazing way with a lot of clean sheets," Merino said.

"But we know that this is just the beginning and we have to keep up this good work in the future to win big things."

The only threat to the eighth successive clean sheet, and a record dating back to 1903, came late in the game when VAR overruled a penalty decision.

Otherwise goalkeeper David Raya spent much of the match as a spectator, watching Arsenal make light of injury absences with another assured display. Leandro Trossard came off and was replaced by Dowman taking a record previously set by Youssoufa Moukoko at 16 years and 18 days with Borussia Dortmund in 2020.

TOTTENHAM CRUISE

In London, Micky van de Ven scored a stunning solo effort as Europa League winners Tottenham Hotspur won 4-0 at home to FC Copenhagen.

He ran over half the length of the pitch before delivering a clinical finish that ranks among the best goals scored in the Champions League so far this season.

By then Tottenham were already leading by two goals thanks to strikes from Brennan Johnson and Wilson Odobert in north London.

Johnson was sent off in the second half when his lunge on Marcos Lopez was upgraded from a booking to a red card after VAR intervened.

Joao Palhinha netted the fourth goal as Tottenham won for only the second time in their last six matches in all competitions.

"It felt like we had Lionel Messi turned into Micky van de Ven," Tottenham manager Thomas Frank said. "I would say it was a step forward in how we want to play. Assists and goals from the offensive players and also the structure was good today."

Elsewhere, Atletico Madrid got back to winning ways following a heavy defeat to Arsenal last time out by seeing off Belgium's Union Saint-Gilloise 3-1.

Serie A sides Napoli and Juventus both endured frustrating draws as the league champions played out a goalless stalemate at home to Eintracht Frankfurt and Sporting Lisbon held Juventus 1-1 — the Old Lady's third draw so far this campaign.

AS Monaco earned a first win, 1-0 at debutants Bodo/Glimt of Norway, and PSV Eindhoven drew 1-1 at Olympiacos.—Agencies

Title holders Al-Ahli continue unbeaten run in Asian CL

DOHA: Defending champions Al-Ahli defeated Qatar's Al-Sadd 2-1 in Doha on Tuesday to continue their unbeaten start to the league phase of the Asian Champions League Elite as fellow Saudi Pro League side Al-Ittihad sealed a 3-0 win over Sharjah FC.

Al-Ahli picked up their third victory of the campaign to move on to 10 points from the opening four rounds to sit in second place in the standings, two points behind their compatriots Al-Hilal.

Riyad Mahrez put Mattias Jaissle's side in front in the 34th minute when the former Manchester City winger made the most of the home side's defensive deficiencies.

Al-Sadd midfielder Claudinho gave up possession deep inside his own half as the visitors pressed and the ball was worked to Enzo Millot, who set up Mahrez to place a clinical shot into the bottom corner beyond Meshaal Barsham.

Claudinho made amends in the 63rd minute when he fired into the top corner to pull the Qatari side level but, five minutes later, Matheus Goncalves's left-foot strike from a tight angle had too much power for Barsham to keep out.

Meanwhile, goals from Steven Bergwijn, Karim Benzema and Roger Fernandes earned Al-Ittihad their victory over Sharjah from the United Arab Emirates in Jeddah as the Saudi champions completed back-to-back wins in the league phase.

Al-Ittihad lost their opening two matches in a competition they last won in 2005 but Bergwijn gave them the perfect start with a well-placed header from 12 metres out in the eighth minute.

Benzema hit the second goal in the 66th minute when the former Real Madrid forward arrived unmarked in the penalty area to side-foot in Moussa Diaby's centre from the left and Fernandes slid in to score the third four minutes into stoppage time.

The win moves Al-Ittihad up to sixth in the standings, six points behind Al-Hilal as the 12-team league phase in west Asia reaches the midway point.

The top eight finishers in both west and east Asia progress to the knockout rounds in March with the quarter-finals, semi-finals and final to be played in Saudi Arabia in April.—Reuters

Rybakina stays perfect at WTA Finals

KAZAKHSTAN'S Elena Rybakina hits a return against Ekaterina Alexandrova of Russia during their WTA Finals match on Wednesday.—AFP

RIYADH: Elena Rybakina maintained her undefeated record at the WTA Finals with a 6-4, 6-4 victory over Russian alternate Ekaterina Alexandrova in Riyadh on Wednesday.

It was a rematch of the Ningbo final from three weeks ago, which saw Rybakina capture her second title of the season.

The Kazakh world number six extended her current winning streak to nine of her last nine matches contested, and will face one of Aryna Sabalenka, Jessica Pegula or Coco Gauff in Friday's semi-finals.

"Ekaterina is always a tough opponent and has a big serve. I'm happy I was able to win in straight sets. Each win gives you confidence and I'm pretty happy that for now my last matches have been great," said Rybakina, who was playing with taping on her shoulder.

Rybakina entered the match with Alexandrova having already secured her place in the semi-finals as the winner of the Serena Williams Group.

Alexandrova was brought in as a replacement for American Madison Keys, who withdrew ahead of the match due to a viral illness.

The Australian Open champion suffered two defeats in round-robin play this week in Riyadh, to Poland's Iga Swiatek and compatriot Amanda Anisimova, and had no chance of advancing to the knockout stage.

At the end of her match against Anisimova on Monday, Keys wouldn't shake her opponent's hand, indicating she was feeling unwell and didn't want to pass on the virus.

"I'm really disappointed to not be feeling my best and ultimately having to withdraw from the tournament. It's a huge accomplishment to make it this far and I'm very proud of myself for doing that and having a great year. I hope to be back next year," said Keys in a statement.

Alexandrova is the second alternate in Riyadh. The first alternate, Mirra Andreeva, who is already competing in the doubles at this year's WTA Finals, elected not to sign in due to not being fit to play on Wednesday.

Andreeva has a doubles match on Thursday, alongside her partner Diana Shnaider, and might still be called in for duty as an alternate if any of the four singles players is unable to play.

Thursday will also see the conclusion of the Stefanie Graf Group, with Belarusian top seed Sabalenka taking on Gauff of the USA and America's Pegula scheduled to play Jasmine Paolini, although the Italian has also reported feeling unwell.

In Wednesday's late match, world number one Aryna Sabalenka earned a 6-4, 2-6, 6-3 win over American Jessica Pegula.

"(Pegula) is an incredible player. She always pushed me to the limit... I was thinking, I'm gonna go after my shots, stay aggressive, put all of that speed back on her and hope that I get my chance," said four-time Grand Slam champion Sabalenka.—Agencies

Salman, Farooq, Khushdil hit tons as Fata dominate Abbottabad

RAWALPINDI: Centuries from Khushdil Shah, Salman Khan Jr and Mohammad Farooq propelled Fata into a commanding position against Abbottabad on the first day of their sixth-round of the Quaid-e-Azam Trophy match at the Shoaib Akhtar Cricket Stadium on Wednesday.

Sent into bat, Fata amassed 460 for three in 90 overs. The innings was built on a blistering 169-run opening stand. Farooq led the charge with a rapid 105 off just 76 deliveries, smashing 12 fours and six sixes, while his partner Mohammad Usman contributed 87.

Salman, arriving at number three, top-scored with 133 from 159 balls, an innings featuring 20 fours and two sixes.

Khushdil Shah remained not out at the close of play on 108 from 152 balls, having struck 12 fours and two sixes.

For Abbottabad, Shahab Khan was the most successful bowler with two wickets.

At the Marghzar Cricket Ground, Karachi Blues' Saad Baig struck his third century of the tournament, scoring 109 from 210 balls against Peshawar.

His effort helped his side post 323 for seven in 90 overs. Wicketkeeper-batter Usman Khan scored 84, while international Test batter Saud Shakeel was unbeaten on 63.

For Peshawar, Sajid Khan, Mohammad Amir Khan and Mohammad Imran Jr took two wickets apiece.

At the Abbottabad Cricket Stadium, Bahawalpur reached 203 for two against Sialkot, thanks to Mohammad Sudais' 112.

At the Imran Khan Cricket Stadium in Peshawar, Multan's Mohammad Ismail took four wickets to restrict Islamabad to 272 for eight, with Rohail Nazir top-scoring with 71.

In Islamabad, Afaq Afridi's five-wicket haul helped Faisalabad bowl out Lahore Whites for 179 at the Diamond Cricket Ground. In reply, Faisalabad struggled to 69 for five at stumps, with Nisar Ahmad taking three wickets.—Agencies

Shahid advances, Sajjad falls at world snooker last 16

DOHA: Pakistan's Shahid Aftab defeated Indian cueist Paras Gupta to progress to the tournament's second stage, while compatriot Mohammad Sajjad saw his campaign come to an end in the round-of-16 during the IBSF World Snooker Championship on Wednesday.

In the other fixture, Sajjad started well against Kwok Wai, taking the first frame 68-33.

Shahid triumphed in a high-quality clash with Gupta 4-2, but Sajjad was unable to overcome Hong Kong's Fung Kwok Wai, losing by the same margin.The match between national champion Shahid and Gupta was a tense affair.

Shahid started strongly, taking the first frame 73-25, but Gupta responded 94-27 to level the match. Shahid regained the lead with a fluent 77-36 frame, highlighted by a break of 72, only for Gupta to once again draw level by clinching a tight fourth frame 76-58.

Refusing to be rattled, Shahid produced a commanding performance in the fifth frame, sealing it 122-6 with a substantial break of 62. He then closed out the match by winning a closely-contested sixth frame 60-49, booking his place in the championship's second stage.

However, the Hong Kong player found his rhythm, winning the next two frames decisively with scores of 81-20 and 82-6.

Sajjad fought back to level the match at 2-2 by claiming the fourth frame 76-32, but Fung regained control, winning the next two frames 68-15 and 75-57 to secure the match.With this result, Shahid moves forward in the main event, while Sajjad will now enter the secondary competition.—Agencies

Pakistan quartet make ITF Jr quarter-finals

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's quartet of Mohammad Hassan Usmani, Abubakr Talha, Mikaeel Ali Baig and Hamza Roman qualified for the boys' singles quarter-finals of the ITF Pakistan World Junior Tennis Championship J-60 here at the PTF-SDA Tennis Complex on Wednesday.

Hassan beat Theodor Kraytchev of Britain 6-2, 6-2; Abubakr downed compatriot Zain Saeed 6-1, 6-0; Mikaeel outplayed Thailand's Napradh Lalai 6-0, 6-3 while Hamza defeated countryman Abdul Basit 6-0, 7-5 in their respective pre-quarterfinal matches.

Other than the four home players, Japan's Ippie Matsushima, Emre Atlamis of Turkey, Lithuania's Kristijonas Milasauskas and Nicolas Moravec of the Czech Republic also reached the quarter-finals.

Results:

Boys' singles (pre-quarterfinals): Mohammad Hassan Usmani (Pakistan) bt Theodor Kraytchev (Britain) 6-2, 6-2; Abubakr Talha (Pakistan) bt Zain Saeed (Pakistan) 6-1, 6-0; Mikaeel Ali Baig (Pakistan) bt Napradh Lalai (Thailand) 6-0, 6-3; Ippie Matsushima (Japan) bt Asad Zaman (Pakistan) 2-6, 6-1, 6-3; Emre Atlamis (Turkey) bt Mohammad Haziq Aasim (Pakistan) 7-6(1), 6-2; Kristijonas Milasauskas (Lithuania) bt Zohaib Afzal Malik (Pakistan) 6-1, 6-0; Hamza Roman (Pakistan) bt Abdul Basit (Pakistan) 6-0, 7-5; Nicolas Moravec (Czech Republic) bt Jun Woo Ye (South Korea) 7-5, 5-7, 6-3.

Boys' doubles (pre-quarterfinal): Shehryar Anees/Asad Zaman (Pakistan) bt Theodor Kraytchev (Britain)/Napradh Lalai (Thailand) 7-5, 6-4.

Girls' doubles (quarter-finals): Zihan Feng (China)/Yewon Lee (South Korea) bt Zunaisha Noor (Pakistan)/Ayris Tokac (Turkey) 6-2, 6-1; Varvara Rubtsova (Russia)/Eyu Yoshida (Japan) 6-1, 4-6 (10-8).—Sports Reporter